

# Home, School, and Community Partnerships that Work

*The model of school, family, and community partnerships locates the student at the center.*

Epstein, 1997

**Children learn best in schools that support academic excellence and that encourage partnerships among school staff, families, and community members.**

**E**ffective partnerships are based upon mutual collaboration and communication. Schools, families, and children want these home-school connections. Research has shown that, in most cases:

- Families want their children to do well in school and want to be involved in their child's education.
- Teachers and administrators want family involvement.
- Children want their schools and families to communicate with one another (Epstein, 1997).

School-family-community connections benefit everyone involved. Families give their children a clear message that learning is an important and respected endeavor. Schools give their students a clear message that the involvement of all families is valued. School administrators demonstrate their respect for other viewpoints by implementing a partnership model in which staff, family members, and community members are offered genuine roles in important decision making.

Family and community involvement in the schools has the added benefit of extending the boundaries of learning beyond the school building. Such involvement can lead to a better understanding of both school and community needs. School staff, family members, and community members are encouraged to become advocates for the schools and the community and to work together for school and community improvement.

Too often schools fail to recognize and remove barriers that limit family and community involvement in the schools. The scheduling of meetings and events during the traditional school day, lack of child care for younger children, lack of transportation, language differences, and families' own educational experiences may interfere with greater school involvement (Coleman, 1991). Remedies can be as simple as scheduling meetings at times more convenient to families, providing child care, transportation, and translators, as needed, and creating family friendly spaces within the schools.

Getting families more involved in schools will not necessarily lead directly to better student achievement but may have other positive effects. Epstein (1997) has described six types of school involvement that may lead to changes in students' achievement, attitudes, and/or behavior:

1. Parenting: [to] help all families establish home environments to support children as students

2. Communicating: [to] design effective forms of school-to-home and home-to school communication about school programs and their children's progress
3. Volunteering: [to] recruit and organize parent help and support
4. Learning at home: [to] provide information and ideas to families about how to help students at home with homework and other curriculum-related activities, decisions, and planning
5. Decision Making: [to] include parents in school decisions, developing parent leaders and representatives
6. Collaborating with Community: [to] identify and integrate resources and services from the community to strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning and development

After choosing a goal upon which to focus, school staff, family members, and community members can identify the type of family involvement and the strategies that will help them reach that goal.

*In a partnership, teachers and administrators create more **family-like** schools...[and] parents create more **school-like** families.*

Epstein, 1997

Rarely, if ever, can one person working alone create lasting, comprehensive change. Effective school-family-community partnerships require a committed team and a plan for action. The team is most likely to be successful if its membership is representative of all stakeholders. Successful teams also need access to resources and time to meet.

Before developing an action plan, school-family-community teams need to determine what is already working and what needs to be improved. The primary focus of action plans should be student success. Action plans should also contain connections to curricular and instructional reform.

Like rose gardens, school-family-community partnerships need to be nurtured. Partnerships are more likely to be successful when members trust one another, are committed to a common goal, communicate effectively, and share a commitment to the development of individual members' skills and abilities. Effective partnerships also take time. Short term goals and planning should take place within the context of a multi-year plan.

School-family-community partnerships benefit families, schools and the community. The primary beneficiary of these partnerships, however, is the student.

## References

- Coleman, M. (1991). *Planning for parent participation in schools for young children*. Urbana, IL: ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education.
- Epstein, J. (1997). *A comprehensive framework for school, family, and community partnerships, in school, family, and community partnerships: Your handbook for action*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, Inc.